

## ON SHAKING HANDS

We perform a great many actions every day, of which we never consider the significance, and which, if we were to take the time to consider, would give us much food for thought. One of the most common of these is that of shaking hands. Have you ever stopped to consider the significance of that very simple act? Shaking hands is our usual method of greeting each other. How, or when, it came into practice I do not know, and, I think, would have considerable difficulty in finding out. But why that particular manner of greeting was chosen, is more interesting, and gives us more food for conjecture. Possibly it was used as a sign of peace between people, when fighting with the sword was a common practice. In order to show that there was no hostility between them, they extended their right hands to each other, as a pledge that they did not intend to use their swords. Or perhaps it was chosen simply because it was the best manner they could find of transmitting their feelings to their fellow-men.

Whatever may have been the reason for its introduction, at any rate it has become a custom, and perhaps the most common and best manner of greeting that we have. Although we have other practices which seem to be displacing this one, yet I feel sure the handshake will remain our commonest method of greeting one another. There is a great personality in the handshake, a something that conveys a person's feeling to us. What a depth of sympathy may be expressed in this simple act! Who has not felt, when he was in sorrow, the comfort that comes from the grasp of a friendly hand? And what a depth of feeling is expressed in that handclasp! Or, when we have succeeded, what gladness is brought to our hearts by the friendly handshake, which expresses clearer than words that we have a friend who is glad of our success. But it is not when we are in the midst of success that we realize the full value of the handshake; it is when everything is going wrong, when even God appears to have forgotten us, and we are almost in despair. A friend comes along and clasps our hand. How quickly we realize that he is a friend. Some of his personality seems to flow from his hand into ours, and we immediately feel ourselves becoming strengthened; then we determine to fight on, for

life is surely worth living, and our ideals worth fighting for, so long as we have a friend to stand by us.

There are many different kinds of hand shakes. I remember, when I was about seven or eight years old, our parish priest used to visit us sometimes. He would call me over to shake hands, and I, being very shy, would not go till exhorted by my mother. The moment I felt his friendly hand clasped in mine, however, all my fears were gone, for, child though I was, I felt the kindness and sympathy of the man, as expressed by his handshake. I recall another occasion. This was when our girl cousins used to come to visit us. When they would arrive they used to kiss my mother and sister, while I waited in terror for my turn. But how glad I was when they only shook hands with me. It was on occasions like these that I realized the full value of the handshake. Then sometimes Uncle Tom would come, and he would squeeze my hand so tightly, that it took all my will power to keep from screaming.

Since I have grown up I have noticed many other different varieties of hand shaking. First there is the clammy handshake which sends a thrill of repugnance through you, and you are relieved when it is over. Then there is what I used to think was the fashionable handshake, in which the person gives you only a slight touch of the top of the fingers, as if they were afraid that any of his personality might pass from him into you. But then there are those who give your hand a good healthy squeeze. These are the people who realize the value of the handshake. This kind of handshake will set us at our ease when embarrassed, and will give us a firmer hold on life; we resolve to keep up our courage, for then we realize that human nature is not so bad as it appeared to be; and, although we may have allowed ourselves to become discouraged for a while, and could only see the bad side of life, yet this handshake brings us to the realization that human nature has also its good qualities, and there is a depth of feeling and sympathy in the world after all.

Thus, if it were not for the handshake, would we not lose a very expressive way of greeting our fellow men? And would this not be a much gloomier and sadder world in which to live?